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CONSIDERATIONS  
ON THE  
WOOLLEN MANUFACTORY  
OF IRELAND,  
IN A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO HIS GRACE

CHARLES DUKE OF RUTLAND,

LORD LIEUTENANT GENERAL and GENERAL

GOVERNOR of IRELAND.

*H. Manners (C.) Duke of Rutland*

BY A FRIEND TO IRELAND.

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CONSTITUTION

OF THE

WOMAN MANUFACTURE



E. R.

CHARLES DICKENS

Illustrations

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TO HIS GRACE  
THE  
DUKE OF RUTLAND.

MY LORD,

NO man can be more firmly persuaded, than I am, of the anxiety which accompanies the station of Chief Governor of Ireland, or more fully sensible of the superior difficulties, which, at this crisis, call forth the utmost firmness of your Grace.

To prevent the respective interests of the sister-kingdoms, united under one sovereign for their common safety, from clashing with each other—to give the restless minds of men in this country the happiest direction, and dispose them to profitable pursuits—to

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repress



reprefs the licentious, and fecure the laborious artift from periodical diftreffs—are the great objects which require the attention of your Grace, at a moment when there is no political arrangement in this country, however ancient, whose ftability has not something to fear from that undiftinguifhing love of change, which prevails throughout a great part of the kingdom.

Thus peculiarly circumftanced, your Grace has a claim to more than ordinary fupport from every honeft man, and the moft impartial information on the means of eftablifhing public peace and induftry. I fhall therefore prefume to addrefs your Grace on a fubject of infinite concern; with all that refpect, which the benevolence of your heart infpires.—

The ftate of the woollen and worfted manufacturers of this city is a matter of ferious confideration.—The impreffion which their fufferings, before and after the commencement of the laft feflion of parliament, made on every humane difpofition cannot yet be forgotten. And although the licentious conduct of *some* may have roused univerfal indignation, I truft the prefent peaceable deportment of *all* will entitle thofe mifguided men



to the paternal care of parliament and your Grace, and induce the establishment of such provisions in their favour, as will effectually prevent the future occurrence of similar calamity.

IN the course of this Letter, it shall be my study to convince your Grace, that their misfortunes have solely arisen from a radical error, committed at the period when the woollen manufacture was introduced into this kingdom;—in the practice of which habit has confirmed them, and which the wisdom of parliament, with a due observance of the policy of other nations, can alone correct.—In vain have our makers of old and new drapery endeavoured, for a century past, to emulate that elegance and cheapness, for which the fabrics of the sister-kingdom are so justly celebrated; and idly do they still indulge the pleasing expectation of bringing their manufactures to perfection, while false ideas, early contracted, lead them to pursue a system of regulations that must defeat their wishes.

THE error, my Lord, to which I allude, was the establishment of the woollen manufactory

facture of this country in the capital—an experiment equally repugnant to common sense, and the practice of England.

SOBER industry and parsimonious œconomy are the leading features which indicate health, in a community of manufacturers, whose existence greatly depends on the facility of procuring food and fuel on moderate terms. But industry and frugality are not to be found in a great commercial city where the seat of government is fixed, and where political discussion and combination alternately engage the meanest artizan in daily debauchery—where he estimates the value of his labour by the exorbitant price he pays for the necessities of life;—and frequent examples of successful fraud seduce his mind from honest application by the prospect of easier and speedier means of subsistence.

To expect manufactures will come cheap to market under those circumstances, must appear to be visionary, if we consider how great a portion of time is wasted by the lower order of the people, and how frequently they are drawn from their industry by those amusements with which a capital abounds.

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Little ingenuity or attention would be requisite to ascertain the quantity of labour lost to this kingdom on every occasion, when the working people are informed that a balloon will be liberated, a criminal brought to justice, or some remarkable anniversary celebrated.—I might also observe, that a great part of time is spent in negotiating their public affairs, and forming a congress for that purpose, whose members are indemnified for neglecting their private concerns by an allowance out of the industry of the body at large. But much pains and ability would be necessary to convince those misguided men, that such portions of time usefully employed would enable them to reduce the price of their labour, bring their manufactures cheaper to market, and render the kingdom flourishing and happy.

THIS waste of time, your Grace will easily perceive, obliges the working people of this city to require an exorbitant price for their labour, which immediately deprives them of a sale for their manufactures.—From this cause chiefly has arisen the want of employment, so frequently complained of—a misfortune which must repeatedly occur as long  
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as the makers of old and new drapery continue to reside in the capital, where the various orders of working people, united in firm confederacy, daily combine either to raise or oppose the reduction of their wages, which have been so fatally encreased here by frequent innovations, that the rates of workmanship in this country no longer correspond with those of England, the *Irish weavers* being paid, on some articles of *new* drapery, more, for a given quantity of labour, *by one-half*, than is allowed in the sister-kingdom.

THE dearness of labour is further augmented by a regulation established among all the societies of working men in this metropolis, equally injurious to its police, to industry, and civil liberty. — By this provision, no person will be suffered to apply himself to any branch of manufacture, but that to which he has served an apprenticeship \*, although the

\* The English statute of the 5th Eliz. which subjects every person to a forfeiture of forty shillings per month for working at a trade to which he has not served an apprenticeship of seven years, has not been adopted in this kingdom; it is however observable from several expositions of this statute, that the English Courts of Justice were extremely  
anxious

the latter may have totally declined, and the flourishing state of the former may require an addition of new hands. Thus it constantly happens that the number of persons employed in a particular branch of manufacture are not able to supply the demand for labour, while several, disposed to industry, are seen begging in the streets.—Which would not be the case, if the redundancy of hands, occasioned by the decay of one species of manufacture, was suffered to fill up the deficiency created by the vigorous state of the other.

EQUALLY unfavourable to the prosperity of the woollen and worsted manufactures of this country, is the unnecessary expence of preparing the primum of those fabricks in the capital. Agreeably to the present mode of conducting this business, the manufacturer of bay yarn is under a necessity of riding 70 or 80 miles § into the country parts of Ireland, in pursuit of the raw material, which, when purchased, is brought up to the metropolis to be combed, the necessary fuel for this

anxious to encourage every class of manufacturers to work in the country, having solemnly determined that for trading in a country village apprenticeships were not requisite.

§ Our principal wool-fair is annually held in Ballynasloe, in the county of Roscommon.

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operation being also brought up from parts extremely distant. The material, thus far prepared, is sent into different counties to be spun, from whence, after a considerable period, it returns to the wool-comber; *loaded with the unnecessary charges of repeated land carriage, factorage, and the interest of money, which accumulates by this dilatory process, to be disposed of to the weaver.* An expenditure, which might be avoided, or happily directed, as in England, to encourage the industry of the spinner, and induce her to make that excellent yarn, to which the new drapery of Britain owes its superiority, and without which the Irish weaver cannot work on as moderate terms as the English, or produce fabricks equally elegant and durable.

THE other gradations of manufacture, which precede the operation of weaving, are the winding, twisting, scouring and warping of the yarn, all which are executed in the sister kingdom for wages considerably lower than what are now paid in this city, where the various *frauds committed on the master, by the repeated embezzlement of the material* in the vari-

|| The fuel for this purpose is brought up from Kilkenny.

ous



ous stages of preparation, also contribute to advance the price of Irish manufacture on the public, a practice which is unknown in Britain, and which will cease to exist here whenever the Irish weaver shall be encouraged to purchase the material from the spinner, and assured of a market for its sale, when taken from the loom.—In this judicious manner is *our staple* manufacture carried on; and by this policy has industry been firmly established among our fellow subjects in the north.

ANOTHER fatal consequence of continuing manufactures in a great commercial city, is the want of schools, wherein the children of the working people might acquire early habits of industry.—To this cause, therefore, we may ascribe the total neglect of female children in this country, while the sister kingdom is peculiarly attentive to derive every possible advantage from their labour.—A circumstance, which contributes in no small degree, to render our manufactures of old and new drapery dearer than British, as the workman here requires a price for his labour, sufficient not only to subsist himself, allowing some days

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of idleness, but to maintain a number of children brought up in utter indolence.

AND here I must beg leave to advert to that burthen, which the revenue sustains and must continue to sustain while our manufactures shall be thus carried on.—The necessity of subsisting 20,000 persons in the capital, who are employed in the making of old and new drapery makes it expedient, by means of bounty, to force into it a sufficiency of corn for their maintainance.—The premiums paid on such a portion of that article, as is consumed by those 20,000 persons, operates as a tax on labour, and the revenue, which might be removed.—The industry of the farmer and his cattle are lost to the public, while he is transporting his grain to the capital and waiting there for his quantum of the bounty ; and, by the land carriage of such corn the roads are broken up, which the counties are heavily taxed to repair.—To the same market is the grazier obliged also to send the produce of his land, considerably advanced in price and diminished in its quality, when for a great part of that produce he could find a demand at home, if the persons above described were sent to cultivate the manufactures in the village around him.

THESE

THESE are the obvious causes, your Grace will easily perceive, which tend to raise the price of labour and manufactures in this country, which deprive us of a market for our woollens, and multiply the complaints of the working people—To remove those evils it will be necessary to bring down the price of labour, by introducing the manufactures into parts remote from the capital—where food, fuel, and material are cheap, and no inducements to idleness are to be found.—By judiciously distributing the working people through several counties of the kingdom, which are thinly inhabited, the spirit of combination, now so prevalent among them, being feebly supported, will gradually die away, multitudes of unemployed and starving manufacturers will no longer croud the avenues of our city, the extraordinary aid of parliament will be no longer necessary to support them in the House of Industry † or your Grace's bene-

† The poor in the House of Industry on the 1st February, 1785, amounted to the alarming number of 1,621, and the annual expenditure thereof to 10,000*l.* from a great part of which charge, it is conceived, the public would be relieved by the establishment of the woollen and worsted manufactures at a distance from the capital, as many of them,



beneficence to prevent them from perishing for want of bread,

BUT in forming opinions on a subject of so great importance, it will be necessary to enquire into the policy of other countries, and to observe minutely the manner in which the woollen manufacture is carried on by the sister kingdom, the result of which observation may possibly reflect much light upon a question warmly discussed in the last session of parliament.

IN England, every branch of old and new drapery has not only been established in parts extremely distant from the capital, *but detached with cautious circumspection from the rest.* That wise nation early foresaw that her staple manufacture could only arrive at superior excellence and come cheap to market, when those employed in the cultivation of it were enabled to procure its premium, and the necessaries of life on moderate terms.—She was convinced that several small communities of

now depending on the institution for support, are manufacturers of old and new drapery, who have gone in there for want of that employment, which would be secured to them by reducing the present high price of labour.

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manufacturers, unconnected with each other, could be managed with more care, than one immensely large.—That a single village of artificers would not be disposed to associate, for any purpose of combination, having no confederates in their neighbourhood to support them.—And that if they were, the principal offenders might quietly be seized, and instantly punished—but that in a metropolis they would be induced to combine, because their numbers, which inspire audacity, would render it not only impossible to discriminate, but even dangerous for the ministers of justice to seize the guilty.

From those considerations she chose the counties of York and Durham for the establishment of her manufactures of old and new drapery, being remote from the seat of government, and capable of producing food, fuel, and material in the greatest plenty.—The advantages which she has derived from so happy an arrangement, and which must arise to every country, that has wisdom enough to follow the example, are fully evinced by experience.

For thus situated, the *English* manufacturer finds no political discussion, combination

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or idle entertainments, to alienate his mind from labour. By a vigorous exertion of his industry he soon acquires ability to commence a manufacture of his own, and to purchase the raw material—in the preparation of which *all his children* are constantly engaged, each in a several department suited to his years;—having a property in the wool he *husbands it with care*, and brings it with *the least possible diminution through every stage* of the manufacture, then transporting his web to the best, and nearest market, he disposes of it to the highest bidder, and returns contented to his family with fresh material to employ them.—By repeating this process he gradually swells his little stock, which allows him to extend his trade if the demand for his manufacture should encrease, and prevents him from becoming a burthen to the public on every occasion when the market suffers a decline.

THE fabricks, thus far manufactured in the country parts of England, are in general bought up by agents from the capital, to which they are conveyed for the purpose of being dyed and finished either for the home consumption or exportation.



IN this simple and judicious manner, your Grace observes, the manufactures of old and new drapery are carried on by the sister-kingdom.

I THOUGHT it more necessary to be minute in the description of this process, (to which I conceive her manufactures are chiefly indebted for their prosperity) because several persons, unacquainted with the fact, have entertained an opinion, that the woollen fabrics of England owe their perfection to the operation of those duties which are payable on the importation of all foreign goods of the same species, and have therefore concluded, that equal benefits would arise to this kingdom from the adoption of a similar measure. An inference, that would appear less absurd, if the present situation of the woollen manufacture, in this country, corresponded with its situation in the sister-kingdom, when duties were *there* established—which I do not think any man will venture to assert, *for at no period of time whatsoever was the woollen manufacture of England carried on in the capital.* Whether such a measure therefore would operate in this country, *at the present moment*, to introduce our manufactures into the internal parts thereof, and to decrease the price of labour, or on the contrary

trary to fix the former for ever to the metropolis, and to augment the latter, deserves well to be considered. It is very observable, that Great-Britain *has not been able to remove her manufacturers of silk from the seat of government since they have obtained duties for protection*;—a circumstance much lamented by many sensible writers, one \* of whom in particular observes, that the Spittal-field weavers have given more disturbance to parliament, for a century past, than all the other manufacturers of England put together.—But that great and lasting advantages were secured to a rival kingdom, by so *premature* a measure, will fully appear from considering that France, fortunate enough to have established *her* silk manufacture in parts † remote from the capital, before she entertained any thoughts of protecting duties, has been enabled by the cheapness of her *provincial* labour to undersell Great-Britain in every foreign mart, where their respective fabrics of this description have been exposed to sale.

\* Anderson on Industry, vol. i. p. 85.

† The silk manufactures of France are established at Lyons and Tours; in the former of which places there were at one period 18,000, in the latter 8,000 silk looms employed.

BUT, my Lord, the improvement of her staple and other manufactures is not the only advantage which Great-Britain has derived from their establishment in her several counties.—What, but the effects of this judicious policy, has swelled her population to its present amount, and enabled her, when contending with the most powerful states of Europe combined against her, to send formidable armies to every quarter of the globe—and to raise for domestic security, a robust militia, sufficient to repel every invader? Are not the capitals of England and France, scarcely disturbed in a century by popular commotion, universally admired for their police, at a period, when that of Ireland is daily exhibiting a scene of idleness, beggary, and licentious fury? And is it not obvious, that this difference results from the circumstance of manufacturers being excluded from the former, while the latter is surcharged with miserable beings, alternately manufacturers, mendicants and ruffians?—who deprive us of the blessings of civil liberty, destroy all foreign credit, and prevent the inhabitants of other countries from adding their industry and wealth to ours by coming to reside among us. Whence does it originate, that agriculture

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flourishes



flourishes, and the landholder in those counties of England which are farthest from the capital, enjoys all the comforts and conveniences of life, while a great part of the tenantry in the southern and central parts of Ireland, though possessed of a soil naturally fertile, are unconscious of those blessings, if not from the policy of providing a market for the industry of the former, by the establishment of some manufacture in his neighbourhood, and the neglect of so beneficial an arrangement *here*?

By inattention to this system are some counties of Ireland to this day in a state of unreclaimed barbarity, and by a due observance of it has the turbulent spirit of Scotland been civilized and disposed to industry. Instead of a country constantly exciting the most anxious apprehensions in the British government, she is now become the parent of agriculture and manufacture. That similar establishments in certain counties of this kingdom, where bold insurgents are constantly engaged in violating the laws and public tranquility, would produce benefits equally great cannot be doubted.—Even the wayward temper of those men affords the strongest ground for  
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such sanguine expectations:—Restless and discontented with their lords, they have been long alienated from the landed interest:—The augmentation of their rent and tythe, in proportion as the soil is fertilized, they consider as a grievance. Manufacture free from those discouragements would easily gain their affections. Thus prepared to fly off from their dependence on the former, 'tis more than probable they would soon attach themselves to the latter; by degrees their natures would be meliorated, and lose at length those rough and savage manners, for which the common Irish have been so long remarkable; industry, as a sensible writer observes, being the first step to civility, and the surest pledge of domestic peace to government, those who labour for their own subsistence being least disposed to invade the property of others,

IN the contemplation of this subject we cannot overlook the advantages that will arise to the landed interest of this kingdom if the plan I propose, should be thought worthy of adoption.—The augmenting population and creating a demand for the produce of the soil, in those parts of the country where little at present is to be found, are not the

the only advantages to be derived from it.— But as facts induce conviction stronger than speculative reasoning, I shall content myself with presenting to your Grace a short view of the blessings which such arrangements have conferred on the sister-kingdom.

BEFORE the establishment of manufactures in Aberdeen, the natural sterility of that country became proverbial.—This district, between which and the south of Scotland, Nature has raised mountains almost inaccessible, presented to the eye for a considerable number of miles towards the north, a continued morass with scarce a feature of vegetable life. The few inhabitants, whom chance had placed there, unconscious of a better climate, rented the soil at 6*d.* an acre; but no sooner were manufactures introduced, and a market provided for the farmer, than his industry began to exert itself. By laborious perseverance those marshes were quickly drained and wooded; and to such a degree of improvement have they since arrived that 6 and 8*l.* an acre is now the common rent of such land as I have above described\*. The

\* The town of Aberdeen imports annually 20,800*l.* worth of wool, and manufactures 69,333 dozen pair of stockings.—Pennant's Tour, vol. i. p. 121.

progress



progreſs of the little village of Paisley has been equally rapid †. But no part of Great-Britain merits our attention more than Hallifax in Yorkſhire. This pariſh, now ſo famous for its manufacture of new drapery, is ſaid to have been, at a period not very diſtant, ſo adverſe to the ſuſtinance of man, that *human nature* could ſcarcely exiſt there.—With this deſcription we chearfully conſtraſt the account which Doctor Watſon has given of it in the year 1763, when, by accurate ſurvey, it was found to contain 41,221 inhabitants,—the ſame effects were happily diſfuſed, by the introduction of the woollen manufacture over the whole county of York, which boaſts at this day not leſs than one and thirty great towns, where this manufacture, with all its dependent branches, is now cultivated with unequalled proſperity.—It would not indeed be fair to eſtimate the population of all thoſe towns, by Hallifax, but

† The population of this village has increaſed in leſs than 30 years ſo conſiderably, that it now contains 12,000 inhabitants, though it did not contain 4,000 before the eſta bliſhment of manufactures there.—The value of white threads annually made there amounts to 50,000l.—of lawns to 70,000l.—and of ſilk gauze to 60,000l.—Pennant's Tour through Scotland, vol. ii. p. 143.

our astonishment, occasioned by the vast wealth and power of the British empire, will vanish, when we contemplate the support which she is enabled to draw from one county alone, out of those 40 into which England is divided.—Thus have manufactures been made in the sister kingdom, by a judicious cultivation of them, auxiliary to agriculture, population, and public tranquillity; objects that we are likely to attain by a progression miserably slow, as long as our manufactures shall be continued in the capital.

I HAVE now, I fear, compleatly worn out the patience of your Grace, nor would I trespass longer on your time, if the respect I entertain for a very able writer did not induce me to state *his* sentiments to your Grace on the subject of this letter.—The crowding manufacturers, says Lord Kaims, into a great city, particularly if the seat of government is fixed there, produces the worst effects; for in a metropolis, the populace, being *ductile*, are easily misled by ambitious and designing men, who, availing themselves of critical times, and acquiring artificial influence, embrace every opportunity to disturb the public peace,

peace.—Besides, a large capital<sup>a</sup> is a professed enemy to the free circulation of money—the current coin is accumulated there, while distant provinces sink into idleness,—for, without money, the provinces cannot flourish.—Thus we find less and less activity in proportion commonly to the distance from the capital and an absolute torpor in the extremities.—'Tis impossible to conceive any thing more applicable than many of those observations are to Ireland.

THESE, my Lord, are my opinions on the present state of our woollen and worsted manufactures.—Having endeavoured to state, with candour, the unfavourable circumstances which depress, and an obvious and easy mode of improving them, and of diffusing over the kingdom industry and peace, I now submit them with all due deference to your Grace's judgment, observing at the same time that if the facts which I have stated, and which cannot be denied, should displease any description of misguided men, or any forward leader, who has acquired an influence over them injurious to the public tranquillity, I shall equally disregard their calumny



fly and malice.—Conscious that I have discharged my duty on this occasion as a citizen, an Irishman and a good subject, I have only to request your Grace will excuse me for having trespassed on your patience so long. And believe that I am,

With infinite respect,

Your Grace's most obedient

and devoted servant,

A FRIEND TO IRELAND.

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